

Acushnet, 1908



A town in Bristol County, southeastern Massachusetts, on an inlet of Buzzards Bay, settled about 1658-1659. The town was named for an Indian village that occupied a part of the site of the present city of New Bedford, MA.

Builder: Newport News Shipbuilding, Newport News, VA

Commissioned: 6 November 1908

Decommissioned: 30 May 1936; turned over to the US Navy who commissioned her for naval service on 1 September 1936.

Displacement: 800 tons

Length: 152'

Beam: 29'

Draft: 13' 9"

Propulsion: Triple-expansion steam

Maximum speed: 12 knots

Armament: 2 x 1-pounders

History:

USRC *Acushnet* -- a steel-hulled revenue cutter -- was launched on 16 May 1908 at Newport News, Virginia, by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company. She was sponsored by Miss Alayce Duff and was commissioned at Baltimore on 6 November 1908. *Acushnet* was assigned to the Revenue Cutter Service station at Woods Hole, Mass., with her cruising grounds to encompass Buzzards Bay, Nantucket Shoals, and adjacent waters. Departing the depot at Arundel Cove, South Baltimore, on 5 November, *Acushnet* reached her home port on the 27th.

Over the next decade, *Acushnet* operated out of Woods Hole and ranged the middle and northeastern seaboard of the United States, occasionally visiting the depot at Arundel Cove, Curtis Bay; the towns of New Bedford and Marblehead, Massachusetts, New London, Connecticut, and Norfolk, Virginia. She patrolled regattas -- including Ivy League contests between Harvard and Yale -- and represented the Navy at such events as the International Yacht Races at Marblehead and the Cotton Centennial Carnival at Fall River, Massachusetts, in June 1911. In addition, due to her robust construction, the ship performed yearly "winter cruising" in the bitterly cold sea lanes of the North Atlantic to assist ships and mariners in distress. During the first decade of her service, an Act of Congress became law on 28 January 1915 joining the Lifesaving Service and the Revenue Cutter Service to form the United States Coast Guard.

Upon the entry of the United States into World War I in the spring of 1917, the Coast Guard cutter came under the aegis of the United States Navy as the Treasury Department relinquished control of its ships so that they might take part in the conflict. Initially, her station remained the same, Woods Hole; but, in the winter of 1917, she shifted to more northern climes. Her winter cruising activities then proved to be good conditioning for her duty during the latter half of December 1917 and the first few months of 1918.

In mid-December 1917, upon the disablement of the cutter *Androscoggin* by a severe gale, *Acushnet* was dispatched to Mirimachi Bay to aid the distressed steamer *Cadoras*. However she soon reported that the severe storm had forced her to heave to off Halifax before carrying out her assignment. Before she could resume her mission, the object of her concern, *Cadoras* was later damaged so severely by the storm that she was abandoned as a total wreck.

Acushnet was next ordered to search the Gulf of Canso for American Shipping Board vessels in distress, but soon received orders to prepare to tow and convoy the steamer *War Victor* to New York. Meanwhile, *Acushnet* carried out her assignment and reported that two of the four vessels in the Gut had been held up for want of coal; a third one was being repaired with 10 days estimated for completion of repairs; and the last, *War Victor*, was busily engaged in repairing a broken rudder. On 18 December, the day after the cutter had wired her report on

shipping in the Gut, she radioed that she would be ready to tow and convoy *War Victor* as soon as she coaled, and added ominously: "Weather severe, coal scarce."

Taking advantage of a sudden change to good weather and the fact that no other vessels in the Gut required such assistance, *Acushnet* soon got underway from Port Hawkesburv, Nova Scotia, with *War Victor* in tow, and reached New York on the evening of 23 December. She then received four days of needed voyage repairs at the New York Navy Yard, Brooklyn, New York, before returning to her base at New London. After taking on board hawsers and charts for Nova Scotia and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the cutter sailed for Halifax to relieve the Navy tugs *Sonoma* and *Ontario* in standing ready to provide assistance to Shipping Board vessels in the northern waters.

On 4 January, *Acushnet* received word that heavy ice had closed the Gut of Canso and that passage should be made north of Cape Breton; in addition, she was to search for survivors of the sunken steamer *Iroquois*, whose men were believed to have been shipwrecked on Bird Rock, north of Magdalen Island. Sailing from New London that day, the ship soon encountered a fierce northern gale and anchored in Nantucket Sound to await better weather. Her captain reported that so much ice had formed on the ship from the freezing of wind-whipped spray that her stability was seriously threatened.

However, before disaster struck, the tempest moderated and enabled *Acushnet* to relieve *Sonoma* at Souris on 10 January 1918. The latter soon proceeded to Halifax for coal. *Acushnet* then attempted to reach the shipwrecked mariners reported to be at Bird Rock but discovered weather conditions to be too severe to permit it.

Acushnet again attempted to reach Bird Rock on 17 January but was compelled to turn back due to heavy ice between Cape North and St. Paul Island. *Acushnet* accordingly altered course for Halifax and reported closely packed ice 25 miles from Sydney, Nova Scotia, that, in local opinion, threatened to block the harbor. She subsequently reported that an "ice expert" at Sydney, Nova Scotia, had advised strongly against risking *Acushnet* above Cape North. There, the master of the Canadian Government icebreaker *Stanley* reported that it was impossible to reach the steamer *SS Keynor* which was stranded at Gaspe and that his ship could not tow any vessel through the ice. *Acushnet's* commanding officer accordingly radioed the Navy Department that, under the prevailing ice conditions, he could do no more to carry out his orders. He proposed towing the disabled merchantmen in that port out of Stanley harbor before the ice reached it, but the master of neither ship -- *SS Cicoa* and *SS German* -- wanted to leave port.

Subsequently, *Acushnet* reached Halifax on 19 January for coal. Once there, she also learned that *Cicoa*, investigating the report of shipwrecked mariners,

had managed to close Bird Rock on 11 January and signaled two men plainly visible on shore, but had received no reply to her signals. *Acushnet's* commanding officer considered this proof that there were no shipwrecked men there.

Shifting to Louisburg, Nova Scotia, soon thereafter, *Acushnet* attempted to float the damaged steamship *Angouleme* but after four attempts radioed that the methods being used to salvage the ship were impracticable, the discouraging situation leading *Acushnet's* skipper to radio on 28 January that "extensive wrecking operations" were required. The following day, 29 January, *Acushnet* departed Louisburg with SS *Key West* in tow, and took her to Halifax where they arrived soon thereafter.

Acushnet left Halifax on the last day of January with SS *Adrian Iselin* in tow, and brought that ship to anchorage off Stapleton, New York, on the afternoon of 3 February. Her arduous duty in Nova Scotian waters had caused the ship such great wear and tear that she needed a long stint of repairs before returning to sea. Thus, her crew enjoyed a brief respite from her toil that lasted into the second week of February, 1918.

Upon completion of the yard work, *Acushnet* sailed for Newport, Rhode Island, to tow a floating derrick from Newport to Hampton Roads, departing the former port at 0900 on 24 February. Bad weather forced the ship and her valuable tow to put into New York on 28 February until improved conditions permitted her to resume her voyage.

After delivering her charge to Norfolk, *Acushnet* loaded a cargo of speaking tubes and delivered them to the navy yard at Charleston, South Carolina, where subchasers were being fitted-out for service, before proceeding on to the Washington Navy Yard to take on board 13 3-inch guns earmarked for installation in 110-foot subchasers then under construction. Delivering the load of ordnance to New London soon thereafter, *Acushnet* reached New London in mid-March before she put into the Boston Navy Yard for repairs and alterations to living spaces on board on the 22nd of that month.

Upon completion of repairs on 5 May, *Acushnet* proceeded to Bristol, Rhode Island, and took delivery of the seaplane barge being built there for the Navy by the noted boat builders of the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company. She then delivered the boat to the New York Navy Yard and loaded a cargo of ammunition to be delivered to the Naval District Base, New London. *Acushnet* then took stores consigned to the Special Antisubmarine Force at Norfolk, Virginia, departing New London on 20 June and reaching her destination two days later. Upon arrival, she landed her cargo which included a special "listening device" and engine spare parts for subchasers. *Acushnet* departed Norfolk on the 23d and reached Lewes, Delaware, that same day to perform a brief period of temporary duty attached to the 4th Naval District.

Assigned to salvage duty in early July 1918, *Acushnet* was to enjoy special status, the Navy Department specifying on 16 July 1918 that "orders for movement of *Acushnet* will be issued from Washington and this vessel is not to be diverted to any other duty except by special permission from Operations "In this "new" capacity, the ship performed the same type of duty common to Coast Guard cutters--the removal of menaces to navigation and the assistance to ships in distress. For the next few weeks, basing at New London, *Acushnet* rendered assistance to the steamer *Mohoning* and the steamer *Lake Crystal*. During that time, the cutter received word on 4 August that she and *Salvor* were to be assigned to the Boston Station of the Northern District, but were to remain temporarily based on the salvage station at New London until the completion of the Boston base.

In September and October, *Acushnet* continued her salvage operations out of New London, receiving a respite to tow *Charles Wittemore*, a mission -- despite its not being "salvage duty" -- she was assigned under special permission since no other tug was available. She also assisted *Helvetia* and the schooner *Eleanor Powers* before being ordered to the Boston Navy Yard late in October for repairs and alternations. While there, the armistice was signed in France, ending hostilities.

Acushnet took *Torpedo Testing Barge No. 2* to New London and, later, to Newport, in February and March 1919, respectively, before escorting *Eagle No. 1* and *Eagle No. 3* -- slated for service in North Russia -- to the New York Navy Yard on 4 and 5 March for repairs and alterations to prepare them for their future distant service. Later, *Acushnet* again towed *Torpedo Testing Barge No. 2* from Newport to New London and back before taking the coal barge *YC-289* from New London to Melville, RI., and then returning to Boston to resume her duty as a salvage vessel.

However, this employment was soon to end, since, on 15 May 1919, Acting Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the Navy to discontinue salvage operations on civilian vessels. As a result, the cutter was assigned to the 1st Naval District on 23 May 1919. *Acushnet's* naval service continued into the summer. Between 11 and 24 June, in company with the tug *East Hampton*, she towed *Floating Derrick No. 21* from Boston to the New York Navy Yard and the floating derrick *Hercules* thence to Boston. Subsequently, *Acushnet* proceeded to New London, where she was to assist in mooring and handling G--2 (Submarine No. 31) during depth charge and net experiments in nearby Niantic Bay. Tragically, on 30 July 1919, the submersible suddenly flooded and sank, drowning three of the six-man inspection team then on board.

On 5 August 1919, following the completion of her part in the experimental work at New London, *Acushnet* received orders to return to the 1st Naval District; and, on 22 September 1919, she was returned to the Treasury Department for a resumption of Coast Guard service. Resuming operations out of Woods Hole,

Acushnet's cruising during the winter of 1919 and 1920 was highlighted by the assistance she rendered to the damaged USAT *Powhatan* which had been rendered powerless by clogged pumps, a flooded fireroom, and disabled machinery while proceeding from New York to Antwerp, Belgium, in January 1920 with some 500 passengers on board and a cargo valued at over \$2,500,000. As she drifted at the mercy of the North Atlantic gales, *Powhatan* sent out a call for assistance by wireless. Aid soon arrived in the form of the Canadian steamer *Lady Laurier*, two destroyers, *Leary* (Destroyer No. 158) and *Sharkey* (Destroyer No. 281), and USAT *Northern Pacific*. USCGC *Ossipee* appeared on the evening of 22 January and, upon request of *Leary*, removed 102 passengers and their baggage in boats from the cutter.

Summoned to the scene by the same SOS that had brought *Ossipee* and later, USCGC *Gresham*, to the area, *Acushnet* departed Woods Hole and arrived in the vicinity early on the morning of 23 January, finding that *Lady Laurier* had *Powhatan* in tow. The poor handling characteristics of the powerless transport, however, necessitated *Acushnet's* passing a 10-inch line to *Powhatan's* stern to aid in steering the ship while *Ossipee* ran a 12-inch line to the ships bow. When this arrangement had been completed, the convoy set out. However, *Acushnet's* line parted but was quickly replaced, and the convoy resumed its progress toward Halifax at a snail's pace.

Gresham relieved the two "flushdeckers" late on the 23rd, and all went well until the next morning when one mishap after another occurred to dog the salvagers efforts. *Ossipee's* line to *Lady Laurier* parted, as did *Acushnet's* to *Powhatan*. Although the Coast Guardsmen managed to get lines back to their respective ships, *Ossipee's* again parted, leading *Powhatan* to signal that it would take the better part of the day to heave in chain and hawser and start over. The operation thus suspended until the arrival of a tug, *Powhatan* let slip *Acushnet's* hawser. By this time, the weather had worsened considerably. A strong northeasterly gale, in concert with a blinding snowstorm, caused all ships to lose sight of each other in the swirling whiteness. *Powhatan* did not reappear until the afternoon of the 25th. That evening, however, the little convoy received reinforcement in its battle when the American Wrecking Company tug *Relief* -- an appropriate name -- arrived the morning of the 26th and picked up the tow. The group then again set out, with *Ossipee* aiding in steering *Powhatan* with a line on her starboard quarter and *Acushnet* leading the procession, ahead of *Relief*. *Lady Laurier* and *Gresham* stood by the convoy. Although the weather worsened and made progress difficult, the ships sighted the Halifax light vessel early in the afternoon of 27 January; and, soon thereafter, they helped the crippled transport to a safe haven.

Later that winter on 8 March 1920, *Acushnet* went to the aid of the steamer *Guilford*, which had run aground near Nantucket shoals. The tug *Pocahontas* had arrived on the scene beforehand and had removed the crew from the leaking ship whose pumps had been choked by debris. *Acushnet* soon arrived on the

scene and took the derelict in tow. She then brought the ship, valued at \$630,000 into Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts, arriving on 10 March, where it could be salvaged and returned to service.

However, new duties in the enforcement of the 18th Amendment and the Volstead Act placed new responsibilities on the Coast Guard, presenting it with a task of some magnitude. Prohibition proved tough to enforce, as *Acushnet* and other cutters discovered. *Acushnet's* first brush with a denizen of "rum row" was an encounter, on 11 October 1921, with the schooner *J. B. Young*, off Nantucket. The cutter warned the craft to stay outside the three-mile limit, and the latter complied obediently -- for a while. However, as soon as *Acushnet* steamed away, *J. B. Young* reversed course and touched at Vineyard Haven harbor to do a brisk business in her illicit liquor.

Later, the day before Christmas of 1921, with *Acushnet* on her yearly "winter cruising," the cutter chanced across the small steam tug *Harbinger* -- the latter laden with 300 cases of Black and White Scotch whiskey -- and escorted her into Boston to see that she unloaded none of her cargo of spirits, and later, to Newport. At each stop, federal law enforcement officials saw to it that the craft remained fully loaded.

In December 1922, *Acushnet* was provided with an opportunity to perform her primary function, that of aiding ships in distress, and her auxiliary function, the suppression of the bootleg liquor trade, when she went to the aid of the schooner *Salvatrice*. The latter, discharging her illegal cargo, became caught in an Atlantic gale that nearly crippled her. *Acushnet* took the craft into Boston harbor, her pumps maintaining a successful battle to keep her "prize" afloat. Later, in 1924, *Acushnet*, in company with Customs vessels, seized the rum-running yacht *Fantensa*. Besides attempting -- sometimes unsuccessfully -- to stem the flow of illegal liquor into the United States, Coast Guard cutters also took part in operations clearing wrecks and derelicts from the sealanes off the coasts and in inland waterways.

On 7 May 1924, *Acushnet* found the waterlogged schooner *James C. Hamlen* aground and at anchor; later, in company with tugs *Commissioner* and *Alert*, *Acushnet* succeeded in towing the schooner into Vineyard Haven so that she could be restored to service. In less than a year, *Acushnet* would again be involved in salvage work. On the morning of 13 January 1925, she was summoned to the entrance to Nauset harbor, on the eastern end of Cape Cod, where submarine *S-19* (SS-124) had run aground. Later that day, ships -- including *Acushnet* and USCGC *Tampa* -- converged on the scene to render assistance. Ultimately, salvage vessels hired by the Navy to perform the operation enabled the release of the Coast Guard vessels and successfully brought *S-19* from her perch on the rocks.

In the spring of 1928, *Acushnet* cleared the sea lanes of two menaces to navigation. The first consisted of the wreckage of a wooden ship which she picked up some 5 miles south of the Northeast Light vessel at the entrance to Delaware Bay and towed inside the Delaware breakwater where the Lewes, Delaware, station crew beached it. The second was another mass of wreckage (possibly from the same vessel) in the same general area which she handled in the same manner as she had used with the first. The following November, the Coast Guard destroyer *Henley* spotted a derelict -- the floating derrick *Van Frank No. 2* and turned it over to *Acushnet*, which towed it into Sandy Hook Bay and secured it on 10 November 1928. Ironically, the same ships picked up the same derelict exactly one year later, on 10 November 1929, merely repeating the procedure.

On 15 January 1932, the steamship *Lemuel Burrows*, while en route from Boston to Newport News, rammed the Coast Guard destroyer *Herndon* as the latter steamed on patrol off the fog-bound coast, some 50 miles southwest of Montauk Point. Due to the fog and to the fact that *Herndon's* radio transmitters had been rendered inoperative by the collision, the destroyers identity remained a mystery until the repairs to her transmitters enabled her to transmit distress signals within a half hour of the collision. Upon receipt of word of *Herndon's* plight, *Acushnet* departed her base at Woods Hole and sped to the scene to render assistance. By the time she arrived in the vicinity, a boat from *Lemuel Burrows* had located *Herndon* in the pea-soup fog, and the former had taken the latter under tow. *Acushnet* then took over the towing duties from the merchantman and brought the disabled destroyer into Boston for repairs.

However, *Acushnet's* Coast Guard days were numbered. Toward the middle of the 1930s the Navy had perceived a pressing need for tugs and turned to the Coast Guard for help until new construction could fill the gap. As a result, the Coast Guard delivered *Acushnet* to the Navy at the Norfolk Navy Yard on 30 May 1936. During the ensuing two months, the ship was fitted out for naval service and, on 1 September 1936, *Acushnet* -- classified as an oceangoing tug and designated AT-63 -- was commissioned under the command of LT Percy S. Hogarth, USN.

Over the next five years, *Acushnet* operated in the 5th Naval District, operating primarily between the Norfolk Navy Yard at Portsmouth, the Naval Operating Base (NOB), Norfolk, and such ports as Yorktown, Virginia, Dahlgren, Virginia, and Indian Head, Maryland, as well as Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Annapolis, Maryland, towing barges and lighters within the confines of the 5th Naval District. Besides her routine towing voyages up and down the Potomac and into the Tidewater regions, *Acushnet* performed other duties as required. She towed a cargo of condemned ammunition from the naval ammunition depot at Juliens Creek, Virginia, to the 100 fathom curve off the Southern Drill Grounds and dumped it on the night of 5 October 1939; she towed targets for the battle practices of the heavy cruisers *San Francisco* (CA-38) and *Quincy* (CA-39) on 7

and 8 November 1939. She pulled ex-*Nereus* (AC--3) to her lay-up berth in the James River, in the "Ship Graveyard" off Fort Eustis, on 13 November 1939 and towed targets for the new destroyers *Morris* (DD-418) and *Gleaves* (DD-423) between 18 and 21 November 1940.

Acushnet's duties changed little after the United States entered World War II. She continued her operations in the Chesapeake Bay region, touching at points on the Potomac River and along the Maryland and Virginia coasts, as before. *Acushnet* remained attached to the 5th Naval District until June 1944, when she was temporarily assigned duties in the Panama Sea Frontier. Shortly before this change of station, the ship was reclassified an "oceangoing tug, old," and re-designated ATO-63.

Departing Norfolk on 28 June 1944, *Acushnet* reached Balboa, Canal Zone, on 13 July, via Havana, Cuba, and operated under the auspices of the Panama Sea Frontier until returning to Norfolk on 11 August 1944.

Shortly after resuming her operations in the Tidewater area, *Acushnet* was returning from the Southern Drill Grounds during heavy weather on the evening of 13 September 1944 with target raft No. 67 in tow, when the latter drifted and damaged the tugs rudder to such an extent that *Acushnet* had to be taken in tow by the destroyer escort, *Clarence L. Evans* (DE-113). *Sciota* (ATO-- 30) took over the tow from the destroyer escort soon thereafter.

However, by 1000 on the following morning, the storm had attained hurricane force, and by 0100 on the 15th the wind had reached 95 knots. Target raft No. 67 soon parted company from *Acushnet* and ran aground. Later, as the wind and seas diminished, the Coast Guard tug *Carrabasset* (ATCG-1) took over towing the venerable *Acushnet* and brought her safely to Norfolk. The tug underwent repairs at Norfolk for the next two weeks and then resumed her towing duties on the Potomac River and in the Chesapeake Bay region. *Acushnet* thus spent the remainder of World War II operating in the 5th Naval District, indeed as she had done throughout her career in the Navy. However, because of the construction of a new generation of powerful fleet tugs, there was no place in the postwar Navy for such veterans as *Acushnet*. Declared surplus to Navy needs on 20 September 1945, *Acushnet* was decommissioned at Berkeley, Virginia, on 14 December 1945. Struck from the Naval Vessel Register on 8 January 1946, *Acushnet* was transferred to the Maritime Commission for disposal on 12 December 1946.



**"E. Zoole [commanding] The U.S.S. Acushnet, C.G. [sic], pulling on the stranded Portuguese steamer 'Sao Vicente,' near New Bedford, Feb. 1921.";
16 September 1921.**



The crew of *Acushnet* sometime in the early 1920s.

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